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ABSTRACT

In order to examine their willingness to disclose, subjects were given a questionnaire to test the relative contributions to such willingness of stimulus person (teacher, friend, parent, stranger), situation (home, college, public place, social situation), individual differences, and response mode (e.g., sexual behavior, voting preference). The self-disclosure items were selected to represent manifestations of varying degrees of "intimacy," from kissing passionately to yawning openly. Contrary to previous findings, males indicated a greater willingness to self-disclose than did females. A substantial amount of the variance in the willingness to self-disclose was accounted for by the stimulus person. These results lend support to the idea that behavioral predictions are more powerful when one is able to specify the stimulus person as well as the situation, and when one knows the individual's general attitude toward a given response mode.
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VERIFICATION OF A 4-COMPONENT MODEL
OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

42 adults were given a questionnaire to test the relative contribution of stimulus person (teacher, friend, parent, stranger), situation (home, college, public place, social situation), individual differences, and response mode (e.g., willingness to cry, discuss finances, etc.) on their willingness to disclose intimate behavior. The ANOVA revealed that all main effects were significant as were the interactions not involving sex of the subject as a factor. This study expanded previous studies which did not include the stimulus person as a variable. Contrary to previous findings, males indicated a significantly higher willingness to self-disclose than did females. Variance component analyses showed that a substantial amount of variance in the willingness to self-disclose was accounted for by the stimulus person.

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The effects of situational and individual factors contributing to behavioral intentions has been studied across a variety of response modes, e.g., anxiety and hostility (Endler & Hunt, 1966; 1968); leisure activities (Bishop & Witt, 1970); drinking (Sandell, 1968); and birth control (Jaccard & Davidson, 1972). Most of the studies indicate that it is the interaction between the individual and the situation which provides most of the psychologically interesting variance in behavior, although the response modes themselves may contribute substantially to the variance (e.g., Bishop & Witt, 1970; Endler & Hunt, 1966; Sandell, 1968).

Secord & Backman (1974) argue that the individual-situation categorization may be too narrow. They maintain that a more successful approach requires at least four sources of variance, which could be described as: Individual differences; the setting or situation in which interaction occurs; response mode, such as entertainment, work, love, etc.; and the stimulus person interacted with.

Although the studies previously cited have shown the contributions of individual differences, situational variance, and response mode, the contributions of all components of Secord & Backman's model has not yet been tested within a single study.

Argyle & Little (1972) provide support for the inclusion of the stimulus person. They found that the stimulus person accounted for substantial variance (see Table 1), while individual differences contributed less than half as much for each of 18 behavioral interactions (e.g., gossip with disliked neighbor, reveal ambitions to boyfriend, etc.).

The purpose of this study is to apply the variance component analysis (Endler, 1966) to explore the relative contributions of the four components suggested by Secord & Backman (1974) (the stimulus person, the situation, individual differences, and the response mode) on a person's willingness to disclose intimate behavior.

Willingness to self-disclose would seem to be a fruitful behavior to explore because individual differences (including sex differences, Jourard, 1964) have been previously found, and it seems reasonable to postulate both situational and stimulus person differences as well. For example, willingness to describe one's sexual behavior may be inhibited or enhanced according to the situation (at home vs. at school) and the stimulus person (your mother vs. your best friend). One's willingness to cry would probably show a different pattern of responses to situations and stimulus persons.

The following hypotheses are tested in this study: 1) based on the findings of Argyle & Little (1972) it is expected that the stimulus person will account for a substantial proportion of the explained variance in behavioral intentions, either as a main effect or in interaction with situations, individuals and/or response

modes. 2) Women will be more willing to self-disclose intimate behaviors than men (based on Jourard, 1964). 3) There will be differences between people's willingness to disclose intimate behaviors to male stimulus persons as opposed to female stimulus persons.

Method

Subjects were 42 adult (mode = 31-40 yrs.) volunteers drawn from evening courses at two colleges in the Boston area. All subjects were asked to fill out a four-page questionnaire at home, under conditions of complete anonymity. The questionnaire examined people's willingness to be self-disclosing on nine intimate behaviors in front of eight stimulus persons, in four different situations.

The self-disclosure items were selected by the authors and a group of 14 judges as representing manifestations of high, medium and low levels of intimacy. Items considered High Intimacy were: Describe your sexual behavior; Kiss passionately; and Cry. Items considered medium level were: Show anger; Reveal your failure on an important exam; and Discuss your annual income. Low level items were: Reveal your voting preferences; Yawn openly, and Disclose your weight. Note that "self-disclose" is used broadly to indicate a subjects willingness to communicate information about him/herself.

The four stimulus persons varied in their relationship to the subjects: father & mother (intimate), male and female friend (informal), male and female stranger (formal), male and female teacher (submissive).

The four situations were chosen to represent a range of environments all subjects would have had experience with. They included: college, home, a social situation, and a public place.

Subjects used a five point scale ranging from very unwilling (1), to very willing (5). On each page of the questionnaire a different situation was described and subjects were asked to indicate their willingness to be self-disclosing on each of the nine intimate behaviors in front of the eight stimulus persons.

Additional background information on the subjects such as sex, age range, and marital status, was also collected.

Results and Discussion

The hypothesis that subjects would respond differently to male vs. female stimulus persons was not substantiated, so this category was dropped from the analyses. Further analyses were done on scores for the male stimulus person only. A probable explanation for this lack of difference is suggested by a discussion with several male subjects after completion of the survey. Some social changes within this subject pool may have been fostered by the movement for equality between the sexes, and these changes may have been enhanced by the fact that data collection was performed by the female experimenters.

The dependent measures (willingness to perform each of nine self-disclosure behaviors) were reduced to three mean ratings (high, medium, and low intimacy levels) as described in the method. Thus, each entry in the initial analysis represents a subject's mean rating on one of three levels of self-disclosure, in one of four situations, and in the presence of one of four stimulus persons.

Testing of the hypothesis that males were less self-disclosing than females was accomplished by means of a four factor ANOVA, with sex as a between subject variable. Main effects for sex (male: $\bar{X} = 2.919$; female: $\bar{X} = 2.558$; $p < .05$), situation ($p < .001$), stimulus person ($p < .001$), and response mode ($p < .001$) (levels of self-disclosure) were significant, as were all the interactions not involving sex as a factor ($p < .001$). Contrary to our hypothesis, men were significantly more willing to self-disclose than were women, although even the men were only neutral (3 on the scale).

Figure 1 displays an interesting interaction effect. It should be noted that, even with a friend at home, Ss are only somewhat willing to self-disclose. It is clear that stimulus persons are treated differently (main effect), and that the major portion of situational variance is contributed by the home condition. It appears as though inhibitions regarding self-disclosure are reduced at home. It is also interesting in this adult sample to note that subjects are almost as willing to be self-disclosing in the presence of a parent as in the presence of a friend.

Table 1 is a comparison of the results of this study (H, H, N, & S) with the results of previous studies having similar but varying designs. All variance components in this study were determined using a random effects model (Endler, 1966).

The primary hypothesis that stimulus persons would contribute a substantial portion of the variance was supported by the results of the four factor variance component analysis (adapted

from Gleser, Cronbach, and Rajaratnam, 1965) which are shown in the last column of Table 1. In this analysis, stimulus person was the second largest contributor to the variance and it exerted more weight as a main effect than it did in any interactions.

More evidence for the contributions of the stimulus person was found when the data were collapsed across situations and response modes in order to compare them directly with the results of Argyle & Little, 1972 (see Table 1). The differences found in the individual $\times$ stimulus person interaction may be attributable to the fact that the error variance is confounded within this variable, and only a negligible portion of Argyle & Little's variance may be due to the interaction itself.

Collapsing the data across response modes ($A \times B \times D$) suggests that the effect of situations on self-disclosure varies according to the subject, but each stimulus person exerted a relatively consistent effect for all subjects in each situation (since the ABD interaction is confounded within the error variance, no conclusions about this interaction can be drawn here).

Analysis of the data after collapsing over situations ($A \times C \times D$) again shows much of the variance to be attributable to response mode. Individual differences, stimulus persons, and the individual difference $\times$ response modes interaction, each contributed approximately 10% of the variance.

In order to directly compare the results of this study with the previous studies cited on Table 1, it was necessary to collapse the data over the stimulus person factor (see Table 1). Differences between this study and previous studies can probably be

explained in three ways: 1) This four factor study probably cannot be directly compared with two or three factor studies. Subjects in this study were allowed to discriminate among nine self-disclosure items, across four situations, in the presence of four stimulus persons. If subjects were only allowed to discriminate by any two or three dimensions, the variances might have been distributed differently. 2) Variance due to response mode was artificially inflated by building in three levels of intimacy, and in some respects may be considered an artifact. It might be more useful to further analyze the data for each self-disclosure item separately as did Argyle & Little (1972). 3) There may be a real difference in the relative contributions of each of the variance components, depending upon what behavioral intentions are being studied. Some situations can be so powerful (e.g., being in Church) that they may exert far more effect on (for example) willingness to gossip, than do individual differences. On the other hand, intentions to drink may be more a function of how thirsty a person is or how well (s)he likes a particular beverage (individual variability) than of whether (s)he is at home or at school.

It would probably be a mistake to try to generalize from one set of behavioral intentions to another concerning the relative proportions of variance contributed by each of the four factors being studied because a change in the behavioral intentions (e.g., willingness to self-disclose, vs. willingness to have a drink) seems to be associated with changes in the relative contributions made by each of the variables. It is also clear that the contri-

bution made by situational variance is usually lower than that contributed by individual differences, although in some cases situations may exert an effect through their interactions. However, the results of this study do lend support to the model suggested by Secord & Backman (1972): Behavioral predictions should be enhanced when one is able to specify the stimulus person as well as the situation, and when knows the individual's general attitude toward a specific response mode.

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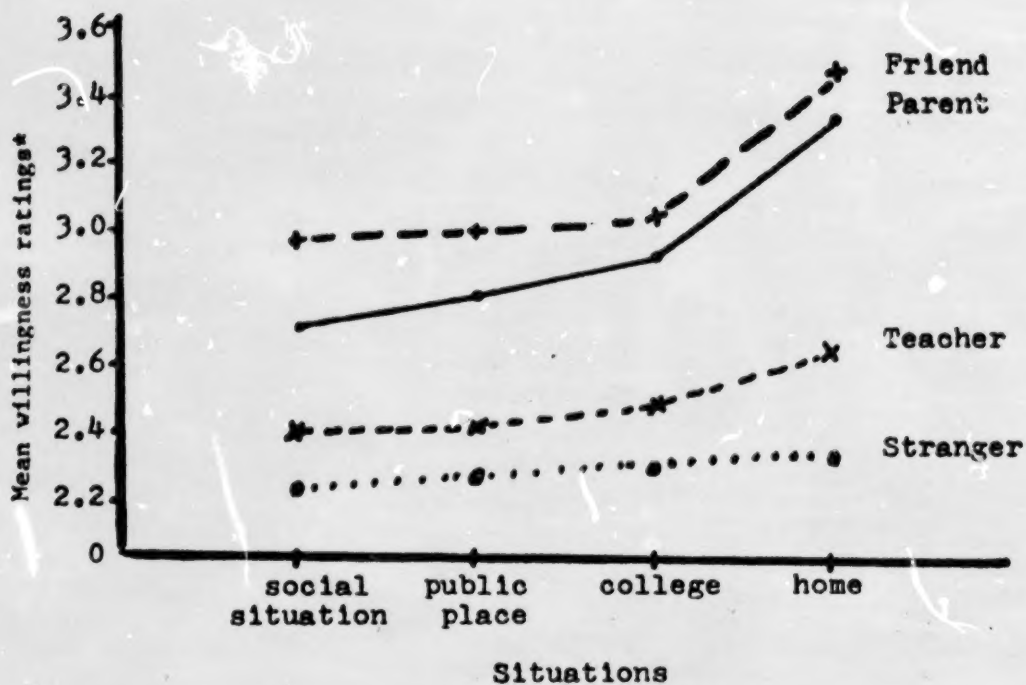


Figure 1. Interaction of situation x stimulus persons for mean willingness to self disclose.
*(1=very unwilling; 5=very willing).

TABLE 1

Amount of Variance in Intentions Attributable to Individual Differences, Situational Variations, Response Mode, and Stimulus Person.

Variance, Z

Design	A x B x C				A x D		AxBxD	AxCxD	AxBxCxD
Source of Variance	1 Sandell	2 B+W	3 E+H	5 H+H+N+S	4 A+L	H+H+N+S	H+H+N+S	H+E+N+S	H+H+N+S
Individual Differences (A)	.5	6.4	7.68	12.19	16.1	12.87	29.18	11.5	6.21
Situational Variations (B)	2.7	3.3	6.20	1.34	-	-	2.68	-	.75
Response Mode (C)	14.6	9.3	22.51	60.79	-	-	-	55.32	48.02
Stimulus Person (D)	-	-	-	-	43.6	85.68	23.29	9.32	7.82
A x B	2.7	5.4	9.97	6.49	-	-	17.81	-	4.66
A x C	11.8	21.2	13.13	9.38	-	-	-	8.95	6.29
A x D	-	-	-	-	40.2	1.45	-	4.84	3.67
B x C	39.8	7.7	6.60	.22	-	-	1.42	-	.10
B x D	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.33	-	.40
C x D	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.55	2.15
A x B x C	27.8	46.7	33.90	9.58	-	-	-	-	6.08
A x C x D	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7.51	4.95
A x B x D	-	-	-	-	-	-	11.53	-	2.20
B x C x D	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.31
A x B x C x D	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.39

1. Adapted from Sandell, 1968

2. Adapted from Bishop & Witt, 1970 (male Kentucky sample)

3. Adapted from Endler & Hunt, 1966, 1968 (Mean of 3 samples)

4. Adapted from Argyle & Little, 1972 (Mean of 18 behaviors)

5. Harrison, Hiltrop, Nathanson & Swap, 1980